

# THE CAT'S MEOW



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## Our Favorite Clarinetist to Open the Season!

Lourie Center at Maxcy Gregg Park (just off Pickens near Blossom)

2:30-5:00 pm Sunday, September 11, 2016

**Note because of Labor Day, this is the second Sunday in September.**

Doug Graham will open the season in fine style for us. It was a bit of an open question because Doug was scheduled for some minor surgery in August. That is now behind him. The operation was a success and Doug will be calling the tunes and making sure we hear more great music.

I'm often at a loss when I start to write a newsletter trying to think of a suitable subject. At some point, it occurred to me that our members would like to know a little about the path that brought each band member to our stage. This will be what I hope is a series of articles.

### **Doug Graham, the Early Years!**

To get things started, I asked Doug if he had ever met Pete Fountain. Here is what Doug had to say: I met Pete Fountain a couple of times in the early 1960's. A gentleman that I knew in my home town in Mississippi was a great fan and friend of Pete's, and he had a son my age. Mr. Cox took me to a couple of concerts when Pete was in our area, and got me backstage after the concerts to talk to Pete. I remember clearly the first time I met him. He was in no hurry to get rid of me when he learned that I was a clarinetist. He was very kind, and I took the opportunity to ask questions about the equipment he used. I learned that he used a Pete Fountain model Leblanc clarinet, a Pete Fountain mouthpiece, and Pete Fountain reeds! I thought at the time that perhaps the day would come that I would share the same information with a young clarinetist about my Doug Graham clarinet, mouthpiece and reeds. That didn't happen, of course, but I am grateful that he took some time with me and encouraged me to continue my studies on the clarinet. His recording of "Just a Closer Walk With Me" inspired me to try to learn to improvise, but that really didn't happen until I met Dick Goodwin at the University of Texas in the late 1960's. Dick was just as kind and encouraging as Pete was, and somehow thought that I could learn to improvise. I took a class from him and learned some of the basics.

THE CAROLINA JAZZ SOCIETY was founded in 1958 to enjoy Dixieland Jazz, one of America's original art forms

### **Doug Graham, the Early Years (continued)**

Fast forward a few years: I joined the faculty of the USC School of Music. Dick suggested that I learn to improvise on "Sweet Georgia Brown" and "All the Things You Are" and join his jazz group at times to play those tunes. I would play the two of them and pack up my horn. I began to sit in with the Jazz Society about that time, and met Tommy Wicks. I would watch him play a solo and get the chord changes from watching his fingerings on his solo, and I was able to do one of my own. I was basically copying what he did, but I had enough chops to sound pretty credible.

Editor's note: I was a member of the Jazz Society when Doug joined the band. I remember that first gig. It was obvious that Doug had great technique but was equally obvious that Doug was pretty new to Dixieland. But it was a real pleasure to watch his progress. Tommy would improvise a variation and Doug would listen intently. Then Doug would build on what Tommy had played – never the same thing, but always an interesting variation.

Doug Continues: "I began playing more often with Dick, and learned a few more tunes, and got more comfortable improvising. I think that I would never have ventured into jazz music if I had been discouraged by any of the great jazz players that I encountered. I had no confidence at all in my ability to improvise. I was trained as a classical musician, and I would not have ventured into the jazz world without the unconditional support of my jazz friends at the time. I still consider myself a classical musician at heart, but I'm finally comfortable, at the age of 70, having a ball!"

### **Pete Fountain (RIP)**

I assume most of you have seen that Pete passed away recently at the age of 86. It seems to me that Pete was often a better exemplar of New Orleans Jazz than Preservation Hall. (on the other hand, the musicians playing at Preservation Hall were very elderly when I visited and the concert varied greatly depending who was on the bandstand and how they felt that night). But occasionally, they could rise to the occasion.

Some purists thought Pete had "sold out" when he joined Lawrence Welk. However, I remember Pete saying (at least I think I remember), "This gave me a chance to bring a bit of New Orleans Jazz to a National Audience".

And I assume Welk paid well. There was a fun satire back in the 80's, or maybe earlier, with a singer doing "The Great Pretender". The pianist is playing "plink, plink, plink" while the singer is doing his bit. But at some point, the pianist swings into modern jazz. The singer says "**Wait! What are you doing?**". The pianist says, "man, I don't do that plink, plink, plink jazz! I do Shearing, Miles and things like that!" The singer says, you do that plink, plink plink jazz or you don't get paid". **The next thing you hear is plink, plink, plink, plink.**

Red Smith, Editor